# THE NIGHT McCARTHY TURNED TO KENNEDY

BY RICHARD GOODWIN

*Former aide to President John F. Kennedy, President Lyndon B. Johnson, Senator Robert F. Kennedy and Senator Eugene J. McCarthy.*

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT EVENTS of the Democratic Convention took place in a Conrad Hilton hotel suite the day before the balloting, when Sen. Eugene McCarthy offered his support and his delegates to Sen. Edward Kennedy. That offer was not to affect the Convention results. But it stood almost alone as a moment of decency and reason, to remind us that the idealistic purposes that had rallied so many of us to the campaigns of McCarthy and Robert Kennedy were a truer reflection of American politics than was the grotesque nightmare of Chicago.

The weekend before the Convention opened, Chicago hotel corridors were swept by rumors of a movement to draft Ted Kennedy. Some political leaders from the larger states felt that McCarthy lacked enough support to win, and that the nomination of Vice President Humphrey might lead to an overwhelming defeat in November. They looked hopefully to Kennedy as an alternative to potential political disaster.

That same weekend—for the first time in a month—the Vice President seemed in serious trouble. The South, led by Gov. John Connally of Texas, and angered at Humphrey's repudiation of the unit rule, threatened a mass desertion to favorite-son candidates. At the same time, it became known that Richard Daley would withhold his 118 Illinois votes in hopes that a Draft Kennedy move might materialize. Without the South, and without Daley, Humphrey might be stopped on the first ballot, and then it would be a new Convention.

I was personally convinced that nothing was further from Ted Kennedy's mind than running for president. Conversations with his closest associates in Chicago reaffirmed the conviction that Kennedy was not a candidate and would do nothing to stimulate or encourage a draft. Still, he had not yet slammed the door.

On Monday morning, as a meeting in his hotel suite broke up, Senator McCarthy walked over to me and asked, "What about this Teddy thing?" I replied that I had not talked with Kennedy but I was sure he was not a candidate and did not want the nomination. I did not believe he would allow himself to be drafted in opposition to McCarthy. Further, he might not allow his name to go before the Convention under any circumstances.

"Well," McCarthy replied, "we might do it together. After all, experience isn't really important in a president as long as he has the right advisers. Character and judgment are the real thing."

I was still unsure of his meaning until he continued: "Of course, he's young, but then, those fellows in the Revolution were young too—Jefferson and Hamilton. But Jefferson had to wait a little while to be president. Still, that's not important. Let's see how things develop."

The rest of the day was spent in a frantic effort to build delegate strength for McCarthy. When his top strategists discussed the possibility of an agreement with John Connally for Southern support, McCarthy made it clear he would rather lose the nomination. In fairness, it must be admitted there was little evidence that Connally was any more willing. During the day, the Humphrey dominance began to reassert itself as the South moved back into line after having compelled support of the Johnson policies in Vietnam. Daley still waited, but we learned that if Kennedy was not available, Daley would go to Humphrey. Although our supporters clung to hope with that fierce conviction that had wrought so many political miracles, it became apparent to some of us the last miracle was not to be. Humphrey would be nominated. Still, we would go down fighting for every vote.

On Tuesday morning, after another strategy session, McCarthy again asked me what I thought about "Teddy." I repeated what I had said the day before. "Are you sure?" he asked. I replied that I hadn't talked to Kennedy and that I felt in a difficult position. Despite my previous ties to the Kennedys, I was committed to McCarthy and would work for him as long as he stayed in, and I did not feel I should be an intermediary. I suggested he talk to Steve Smith. The platform fight over Vietnam was coming up, and perhaps Steve would help. His organizing talents and the name of a Kennedy brother-in-law would add strength to the peace forces. McCarthy could discuss that and then move on to the possibility of a Kennedy draft if he wanted. McCarthy welcomed the idea and said he would be available all afternoon.

I called Smith, saying only that McCarthy would like to see him and that we could use his help on Vietnam. Around 4:30 p.m. Tuesday afternoon, he came to my room in the Conrad Hilton, and we walked down the 23rd-floor corridor, past surprised campaign workers and a few newspapermen, to the Senator's suite. Senator McCarthy joined us in his spacious sitting room. As he and Smith sat facing each other, the talk began with pleasantries and a quick agreement by Smith to cooperate on Vietnam.

Smith then said he wanted McCarthy to know that Senator Kennedy was not a candidate and that neither he nor anyone else had lifted a finger on his behalf. Nor would they do so. His only rule was to listen and observe, making sure that no one did anything that might be misinterpreted as a Kennedy desire for the nomination.

McCarthy listened calmly and then proceeded. "I can't make it," he said. "Teddy and I have the same views, and I'm willing to ask all my delegates to vote for him. I'd like to have my name placed in nomination, and even have a run on the first ballot. But if that's not possible, I'll act as soon as it's necessary to be effective."

That was it. McCarthy had not been asked for support, and he had asked nothing in return. Both Smith and I walked from the room deeply moved. I thought of the snows of New Hampshire, the endless months of campaigning, the dedicated movement that had gathered around the McCarthy banners—all now graciously and austerely offered to the Massachusetts Senator.

We were silent until we reached the elevator. "Let's keep in touch," Smith said, and left.

Later that night, Senator Kennedy—alone in Hyannis Port—let it be known that he would not be a candidate under any circumstances and would withdraw his name if it were placed in nomination. Deeply scarred by tragedy, he had also put more profound considerations ahead of ambition. The year's events and his own inner sense of the fitness of things combined to persuade him that he should not run for president even if, as seemed possible, the chance were freely offered.

The next day, Richard Daley announced his support of Humphrey. It was all over. But at least there had been that moment to help balance the police truncheons and the stream of commands from the White House control panel at convention hall. It wasn't a lot, but it would help many in the painful struggle to rebuild faith in the political process and the men who lead it. END